

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-6. (Canceled)

7. (Previously Presented) An apparatus for filling at least one cavity in an article with granular or particulate material, said apparatus comprising:

a filling chamber containing the material;

a rotating wheel having at least one pocket defined in an outer circumferential surface, said at least one pocket receiving the material in the filling chamber and the outer circumferential surface defining at least part of a lateral side of said filling chamber;

a conveying device adapted to position at least one article having at least one cavity to be filled with said material underneath said wheel to receive said material from said at least one pocket;

a chute configured to supply the material to the filling chamber along a path adjacent to the wheel, wherein the chute has a length such that the material entering said filling chamber from said chute is traveling at a velocity approximately equal to the velocity of the pockets on the outer circumferential surface of the wheel, wherein guide vanes are provided within said filling chamber for directing the material toward said pockets in said wheel.

8-22. (Canceled)

23. (Previously Presented) An apparatus for filling at least one cavity in an article with granular or particulate material, said apparatus comprising:

a filling chamber containing the material;

a rotating wheel having at least one pocket defined in an outer circumferential surface, said at least one pocket receiving the material in the filling chamber and the outer circumferential surface defining at least part of a lateral side of said filling chamber; and

a conveying device adapted to position at least one article having at least one cavity to be filled with said material underneath said wheel to receive said material from said at least one pocket,

wherein a first insertion station comprises said filling chamber and said rotating wheel, said first insertion station adapted to at least partially fill said at least one cavity of said at least one article with the material; and

said apparatus further including a second insertion station comprising another filling chamber and rotating wheel adapted to top off said at least partially filled cavity with additional material.

24. (Previously Presented) A method of filling a cavity in an article with granular material, said method comprising:

providing a wheel rotatable around a stationary drum defining a vacuum chamber, said wheel having at least one pocket defined in its outer periphery, and at least a portion of the outer periphery of said wheel defining at least a portion of one lateral side of a filling chamber;

rotating said wheel around said stationary drum and creating a vacuum in said vacuum chamber;

dropping said material into said filling chamber, and

communicating said vacuum to said at least one pocket over a distance from when said at least one pocket is positioned along said one side of said filling chamber and interrupting said vacuum at a point at which material in said at least one pocket is transferred to a cavity in an article, wherein said wheel and said filling chamber are part of

a first insertion station, and said material is transferred to the cavity in said article to at least partially fill said cavity;

moving said article such that said at least partially filled cavity is positioned under a second insertion station downstream from said first insertion station in the direction of movement of said article and topping off said cavity with additional material from said second insertion station.

25. (Previously Presented) The apparatus according to claim 23, further including a stationary drum positioned inside of at least one of said rotating wheels and defining a vacuum chamber in communication with said at least one pocket over a predetermined distance of rotation of said at least one of said rotating wheels.

26. (Previously Presented) The apparatus according to claim 23, wherein the at least one pocket comprises a plurality of radially inwardly diverging pockets defined in the outer circumferential surface of at least one of said rotating wheels, with a radially inner extent of said pockets being defined by a single perforated band or screen positioned against the inner circumferential surface of said at least one of said rotating wheels.

27. (Previously Presented) The apparatus according to claim 23, further comprising a chute configured to supply the material to at least one of the filling chambers along a path adjacent to at least one of the rotating wheels.

28. (Previously Presented) The apparatus according to claim 26 wherein said perforated band or screen is clamped against the inner circumferential surface of said at least one of said rotating wheels by a clamp ring positioned inside the wheel.

29. (Previously Presented) The apparatus according to claim 27, wherein the chute has a length such that the material entering said at least one said filling chambers

from said chute is traveling at a velocity approximately equal to the velocity of the pockets on the outer circumferential surface of said at least one of the rotating wheels.

30. (Previously Presented) The apparatus according to claim 29, wherein guide vanes are provided within said at least one of said filling chambers for directing the material toward said pockets in said at least one of the rotating wheels.

31. (Previously Presented) The apparatus according to claim 23, wherein said conveying device includes at least one vacuum chamber for drawing the material into the at least one cavity from the at least one of the rotating wheels.

32. (Previously Presented) The apparatus according to claim 31, wherein said conveying device includes at least one chamber having relatively higher vacuum and at least one chamber having relatively lower vacuum, with the at least one higher vacuum chamber being positioned underneath a cavity being filled with material from a pocket in said at least one of the rotating wheels.